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TOPS News

Real People. Real Weight Loss.®

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2026

Making Memories

THE STORIES THAT STAY WITH US



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SCALE WARS

The Tactical Fitness of Unmeasured Success

By Joe "Kirsch" Curcio

I recently bought one of those smart scales. It greets me with a cheerful "Hello," says "Arrivederci" when it shuts off. It even syncs with my other devices, ensuring that Alexa is fully online and available to mock me as needed during my weekly weigh-in.

The other morning, I stepped on the scale and did the usual fearful "peekaboo" look down. I was waiting for it to renegotiate the total—after accounting for my last-minute decision to remove my eyeglasses and Marlon Brando T-shirt for added weight reduction—it didn't help.

Instead, the "personal coach feedback feature," available in five languages, announced: "Good morning, Joseph, you've gained three pounds."

Apparently, with this kind of multi-language option, hearing it in Italian is supposed to soften the blow of a bad weigh-in. It did not.

And just like that, my entire week—my walking, my better choices, the fact that I noticed a dimple on my face instead of my behind for a change—got reduced to one blinking number, with Alexa "tsking" in the background and recommending a list of local salad bars.

But even if it were said in my native family tongue, Brooklynese, "it still woulda ruint my day" and generated the same number of common neighborhood expletives.

It's amazing how five seconds on a scale can dictate how we feel for the rest of the day. But that's on us—and while we're fighting the right war, taking on the scale is the wrong battle.

Expectation vs. Biology

The truth is, the scale isn't a scoreboard—it's a lagging indicator. You hit the salad bar, Greek yogurt, and protein drinks all week and expect linear results—immediate feedback. Instead, your body gives you water retention, glycogen refill, and "... Giuseppe, sei un gavone! Hai preso 3 libbre..." Yep ... that's the three-pound thing in Italian.

But the problem isn't the diet; it's expectation versus biology. So maybe the answer isn't to ditch the scale but to stop letting it have the last word (in this case—literally).

That new dimple you noticed on your face is telling you more about fat loss than any device can—no matter how many languages it speaks.

The tighter, leaner-looking cheeks are one of the first visible signs of fat loss because, unlike those large slabs across the belly and thighs, facial fat is made up of smaller compartments that respond more quickly—even if the number on the scale hasn't changed yet.

And no, you weren't turning into Gumby when your Oxford shirt sleeves suddenly started covering your hands like mittens—that's body recomposition "lengthening" your sleeves from real fat loss by changing the contour of your upper back and shoulders.

Unfortunately, there's nobody out there catcalling over it: "Ooh honey ... that fat on your upper back is looking absolutely mah-velous!" Or ... "OMG! Such long, luxurious arms—like a sexy orangutan!"

So instead, we turn to the one thing that seldom misses an opportunity to ruin your day—the scale.

But the scale doesn't just measure fat—it measures everything: water, muscle, what you ate yesterday.

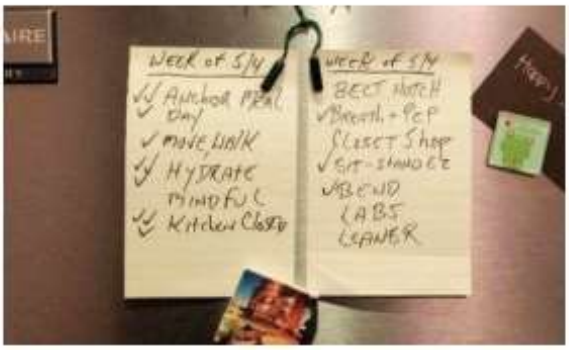
A single high-sodium day can cause your body to hold onto several pounds of extra fluid.

A bad night at The Hong Kong Gardens buffet can max out your glycogen storage—around 600 grams— possibly retaining over 60 ounces of fluid. That's 4 to 5 pounds—without gaining an ounce of fat.

So instead of letting the scale run the show with its mostly toxic weekly health audit, I started keeping score somewhere else ... not with ounces or pounds, but checkmarks. Non-scale victories (NSVs) posted right there on the door of the gateway to either my potential demise or destiny—the fridge.

If I can stack a few ✓✓✓ to at least a half dozen of these NSVs and rituals each week—giving myself credit for things the scale refuses to acknowledge—I know I'm steadfast on that road to success!

So go ahead and grab your Sharpie and your Post-its, and start checking off the things that really count!



Non-Scale Victories

- ☑ **Getting from here to there:** Being less out of breath. Fewer "I gotta check my phone" excuse stops. A little more pep in the step.
- ☑ **Seeing a leaner look:** Face, neck, wrists—or that surprise sighting of your feet making a comeback.
- ☑ **Belt notching:** Always worth a checkmark and an "attaboy."
- ☑ **Shopping your closet and finding a fit:** Unless you're going for vintage or behind the back giggling, proceed with caution on the distressed denim and Members Only jackets.
- ☑ **Sit to stand:** Getting up easier from the chair, the car, the "throne"—with bonus points for "look ma, no hands."
- ☑ **Bending down and surviving it:** Without groaning, negotiating or blaming a deceased relative for dropping things on purpose just to "break your chops."
- ☑ **Lab work wins:** A1C, HDL, eGFR—if you don't recognize these—you should.

The Rituals:

- ☑ **Keep it simple (anchor meals):** Skip the daily negotiations. Eat the 3–4 meals you know actually work. Give yourself a check for each day you do it.
- ☑ **Move more than you think you need to:** Twenty minutes straight or four five-minute rounds—just keep showing up.
- ☑ **Hydrate:** Four bottles on the table in the morning. Gone by bedtime.
- ☑ **Be mindful:** If it's going in your mouth, it counts—even the "harmless" stuff. Do I really need that sugar-free lemon drop, artificial sweeteners, sugar alcohols and those 10 extra carbs?
- ☑ **Learn something about nutrition:** You don't need a degree, zzjust enough Google knowledge to stop guessing. Look something up everyday.
- ☑ **Close the kitchen:** Pick a time. Respect it. Non-negotiable! Shackling down the pantry is optional ... but not completely out of the question. Back "in my day," there was no discussion of glycogen or NSVs—no talking scales—just my Brooklyn Italian father saying: "... ay Joe—ya puttin' on a coupla L-B's there, kiddo... ya eatin' like a gavone ... betta start pushin' yaself away from the table ..." And of course my mother yelling from the bathroom: "... leave him alone, Johnny—he's just holdin' water ..." Ahead of their time? Or what?